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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000942

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ASEC IS KPAL PREL ISRAELI PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS GOI EXTERNAL ISRAELI RELATIONS](#)
SUBJECT: RSO MEETING WITH GOI OFFICIALS REGARDING
PALESTINIAN DEPORTEES

REF: A. ICE/RSO EMAIL DATED 06/02/2005

[B](#). ROSENSTOCK/RSO EMAIL DATED 07/27/2005

[C](#). RSO AMMAN/RSO TEL AVIV EMAIL DATED 11/12/2005

Classified By: DCM GENE A. CRETZ for reason 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#). (C) Summary: At the request of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and RSO Amman (refs A, B, and C, respectively), Post has actively pursued with the GOI the proposal to transport Palestinian deportees from the U.S. to Gaza/West Bank through Ben Gurion International Airport. The Ambassador has raised this issue in both a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in person with the Deputy Director General for North American Affairs. This has been an ongoing issue since June 2005 when then Ambassador Kurtzer officially requested via letter the return through Ben Gurion Airport of five Palestinians. To date, we have not received a definitive response from the GOI, and Palestinian deportee returns continue to transit the Governments' of Jordan (GOJ) and Egypt (GOE) territories for West Bank and Gaza returns, respectively. During the last several months, RSO has met separately with key representatives from the Israeli National Police (INP) and the Israeli Security Agency (ISA) to garner their support, which, in turn, could reinforce our approaches to officials of both the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Interior.

[2](#). (C) Summary continued: On 3/6 RSO met with key representatives from the INP, MFA, and Interior Ministry to discuss the Palestinian deportee issue and request a change in procedure to specifically use Ben Gurion Airport to return Palestinian deportees to the West Bank. Given the GOI's reluctance to change their policy on this issue due to "extreme political sensitivities" and their concern that other countries would request similar treatment for handling Palestinian deportees, the RSO (under the advice of the INP) focused only on returns to the West Bank, particularly due to the GOJ's repeated efforts to wean themselves from this process. DHS currently has one Palestinian deportee who requires immediate deportation from the U.S. and return to the West Bank. RSO appealed to the GOI to permit this return as a pilot case, and provided an official letter with the case specifics. After a lengthy discussion regarding security concerns, GOI bilateral agreements with the GOJ, ramifications of GOI policy change on this issue, and the importance of the issue to the USG, the Head of Population Administration, Ministry of Interior, advised that he would provide a response within 30 days. Embassy Amman should pay particular attention to para 8. End summary.

[3](#). (SBU) DHS has repeatedly underscored to the RSO the urgency of streamlining the Palestinian deportee process to make it more effective and efficient. Given the shortage of detention space, the costs associated with a deportee's care while in custody, and the consequences of habeas corpus filings (i.e., released back into U.S. society), DHS's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), requested Post's assistance in coordinating the return of Palestinian deportees in the U.S. directly with the GOI, utilizing Ben Gurion Airport to effect these returns. Past procedures for Palestinian deportee returns to the West Bank and Gaza have been problematic and required close coordination and approval by GOJ and GOE authorities, respectively. Finding a working solution has become critical, particularly given the GOJ's reluctance to assist in these returns as the RSO in Amman indicated on several occasions (ref C).

[4](#). (C) Since June 2005, Post has actively pursued with the GOI the proposal to transport Palestinian deportees to Gaza/West Bank from the U.S. through Ben Gurion International Airport. The Ambassador has raised this issue in both a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in person with Ambassador Yoram Ben Zeev, Deputy Director General for North American Affairs. The RSO has also raised this issue with representatives of the ISA, INP, MFA, and the Interior Ministry. To date, we have not received a definitive response from the GOI, and Palestinian deportee returns continue to transit the Governments' of Jordan (GOJ) and Egypt (GOE) territories for West Bank and Gaza returns, respectively.

15. (C) During the last several months, RSO has met separately with key representatives from the INP and the ISA to garner their support, which, in turn, could be leveraged against officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Interior. INP Brigadier General Avi Ben-Hamo, Deputy Head of the Operations Department, has been particularly helpful and has convinced certain Interior officials that it can be accomplished from a security perspective. Moreover, RSO met with ISA's Allen Moss, special assistant to the ISA Director, who indicated that it was the INP's main responsibility and that the ISA would pose no objection to returns through Ben Gurion, if proper security and political issues could be addressed. Upon gaining this support from the INP and ISA, RSO requested and received a meeting with Sassi Katzir, Head of Populations Administration (Interior Ministry), and other appropriate officials from the MFA and Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).

16. (C) On 3/6 RSO met with Sassi Katzir (Head of Population Administration, Ministry of Interior), Brigadier General Avi Ben-Hamo (Deputy Head of Operations, INP), Yigal Tzarfati (Head of Consular Affairs Bureau, MFA), Rony Yedidia (Head of Consular Liaison Affairs, MFA), and an Interior Ministry attorney to discuss the Palestinian deportee issue and request a change in procedure to specifically use Ben Gurion Airport to return Palestinian deportees to the West Bank. Given the GOI's reluctance to change their policy on this issue due to "extreme political sensitivities" and their concern that other countries would request similar treatment for handling Palestinian deportees, the RSO (under the advisement of General Ben-Hamo) focused on returns to the West Bank, particularly due the GOJ's repeated efforts to wean themselves from this process. DHS currently has one Palestinian deportee who requires immediate deportation from the U.S. to the West Bank, so RSO appealed to the GOI to permit this return as a pilot case, and provided them an official letter with the case specifics. After a lengthy discussion about numerous security concerns, GOI bilateral agreements with GOJ, ramifications of GOI policy change on this issue, and the importance of the issue to the USG, Mr. Sassi Katzir advised that he would provide a response within 30 days.

17. (C) Based on preliminary feedback from General Ben-Hamo, RSO is optimistic that the GOI will permit limited use of Ben Gurion Airport to return Palestinian deportees to the West Bank, provided they receive necessary escort from ICE. Those Palestinian deportees who wish to return voluntarily and not under ICE escort will continue to transit Jordanian territory to return to the West Bank. RSO and INP have already developed a tentative and safe procedure for transporting Palestinian deportees from Ben Gurion Airport to the West Bank. Additionally, the GOI advised RSO that Palestinian deportee returns to Gaza are much more complicated and not doable at this time based on security concerns and political sensitivities. Hence, all Palestinian deportee returns to Gaza must continue to transit Egypt to Rafah.

18. (SBU) RSO Comment: Mr. Sassi Katzir advised that he will meet shortly with GOJ authorities on a number of issues, and that he specifically intends to address the Palestinian deportee issue with them. If the GOJ authorities respond that they can accommodate Palestinian deportees through its territory, then RSO will lose traction on this issue and the GOI will insist that the deportee procedure remain in its current form, whereby all Palestinian deportees transit Amman and Cairo for return to the West Bank and Gaza, respectively. Therefore, Embassy Amman may want to weigh in on the issue with GOJ authorities. He further stated that the GOJ had not been honoring a number of their bilateral agreements, alluding that this was just another instance.

19. (U) Post will keep the DHS and the Department apprised of all pertinent developments on this issue.

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JONES